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DE RUEHBUL #1233/01 1351002
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 151002Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8898
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 001233

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DEPARTMENT FOR SRAP, SCA/FO, SCA/A, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS USAID FOR ASIA/SCAA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: COIN SUCCESS IN ALASAY IS PROVISIONAL: LESSONS FOR
A NEW APPROACH TO AFGHANISTAN PART II

REF: A. KABUL 954
[1](#)B. KABUL 843

Classified By: PRT and Sub-National Governance Acting Director Patricia
A McNerney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (S) Summary. Two months after a clearing operation to restore Afghan government (GIROA) authority to Alasay, a tenuous security has been established below a line of control that ISAF Forces and the Afghan National Army (ANA) established one-half kilometer beyond the district center. In this area the struggle for power has begun to take place through political competition rather than force of arms. Above the line, the Taliban and Hezb-I Islmai Gulbuddin (HIG) hold sway and are preparing a counterattack as part of their "spring offensive." Neither GIROA nor Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are close to sustaining security below the line of control without the resources and power of the U.S. and its coalition partner, the French. One crucial advantage to maintaining and consolidating gains is the rejection by the majority of the population of a return to the Taliban's harsh social order. Important gaps need remedying, including improving the Afghan National Police (ANP) that has largely been absent, creating a mechanism to support reconciliation, and better synching of development activities behind the PRT's stabilization work. Perseverance and improved organizational competence will be key to producing an acceptable counterinsurgency (COIN) end state in Alasay. End Summary.

Security

[1](#)2. (S) It has been two months since ISAF Forces and ANSF conducted a clearing operation to reestablish GIROA presence in Alasay District, following more than a year of Taliban occupation. Initial COIN success is evident behind a line that runs across the two kilometer-wide valley from about one-half kilometer above the District Center back 15 kilometers to the beginning of the valley. Three combat outposts (COPs), including one in the district center, prevent insurgent freedom of movement, and the population of approximately 30,000 within this zone appears by and large to have accepted the resumption of government authority as legitimate. Yet the security situation in this current "hold" phase remains tenuous. People pass with ease to and from the active Alasay bazaar and the towns below the line. Above the line, the Taliban and (HIG) hold sway among a population numbering perhaps an additional 30,000. Insurgents are able to infiltrate down the valley to plant IEDs, occupy firing positions on the surrounding high ridges, and deliver night letters threatening anyone who collaborates with CF or the government.

[1](#)3. (S) Despite direct action missions that decimated their leadership over several months and the demoralizing loss of as many as 40 fighters during the operation that pushed them

out of the district center, the Taliban and HIG have regrouped and are collaborating for a determined counter-offensive to retake Alasay, which they have declared an important symbolic target as part of their "spring offensive." Reportedly, HIG Commander Qari Baryal received \$200,000 from Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud to launch an offensive. The valley had been relatively quiet until the morning of May 6 when COP Belda received its first probing attack, and all indicators are that a larger attempt is imminent.

¶4. (S) Military forces have probably accomplished as much as is possible given the harsh terrain and troop levels. Any attempt to exclude insurgents from the district altogether would involve a major commitment and be extremely dangerous even against a small number of insurgents. Chasseurs Alpains Colonel Nicholas Le Nen, commander of French TF Tiger (the brigade's combat battalion in Kapisa) said that his intent is "consolidation" that will allow improved security behind the line to create the conditions for governance and development, while above it, the insurgents have free reign, but little to gain. The key to consolidation now is to keep the ANA committed to garrisoning their bases and remaining active.

¶5. (S) As long as the Taliban and HIG can move through the mountains; deliver fighters, supplies, and money from Pakistan; and are able to maintain a force in being, the area is going to remain conflictive. Alasay is one of four main contested valleys in southern Kapisa, and asset limitations oblige TF Warrior to balance the books among them. From an RC-East perspective, force ratio constraints are even greater in the contiguous portion of the theater that extends to

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portions of Kabul and Laghman Provinces. Two under-exploited force employment options that would contribute further results in Alasay include commando raids to disrupt insurgent strongholds and employing Special Forces to work in their traditional Foreign Internal Defense (FID) role with local Pashae tribes, who claim they will fight to rid the Taliban from their villages in the Schken and Schpey Valleys.

¶6. (S) The police in Alasay have been largely missing in action in undertaking COIN operations and protecting the population. The compromised ANP detachment that survived under Taliban control has remained in place, with periodic backfilling from neighboring Tagab. Their numbers have varied from 15 to 50 to protect a population of 30,000. Police officers employ themselves nominally by securing the district center and bazaar, and accompanying the ANA on cordon and search operations. However, there are no check points on the roads in and out of Alasay and no independent police patrolling. The U.S. Police Mentoring Team (PMT) is working to overcome ANP organizational difficulties. Long-term reinforcement depends on rebalancing from provincial reserves, an ANCOP deployment that may materialize in two-six weeks, transfer of proficient leadership from Tagab District, and the 10th cycle of focused district development (FDD) that has Alasay on the schedule in about six months. One way to fix the ANP problem for similar operations in the future would be to use a clear-hold-build approach in tandem with a form of FDD by deploying an ANCOP unit alongside the ANA to restore civil order while sending the existing garrison for remedial training.

Governance

¶7. (S) Governance within the Alasay security bubble is a mixed picture Afghan style, and is still very much in transition to a stable end state. Residents appear generally satisfied with their new district administrator, who seems authentically competent and dedicated. Shura members and their malek leaders have left the fence, at least provisionally, and rallied to the government side. As reported Ref (B), a polarizing struggle for control over

GIROA has pitted HIG's political faction, which is aligned with the provincial governor, against Jamiat-i Islami partisans. Assertions of corruption have begun to fly, and the prospect of election-related political violence emerged with the murder of a prominent HIG Provincial Council candidate in Tagab on May 5. While the power struggle is not necessarily attractive, the replacement of armed force with political competition can be considered a first stage of COIN success.

¶18. (S) In addition to the flurry of shuras that immediately followed restoration of GIROA authority, there are signs that much of the population was spontaneously and actively willing to disassociate themselves from the Taliban and armed HIG: As village elders told TF Warrior Deputy Commander, "You are here because we want you here." The shuras from the three principal villages within the Alasay consolidation zone have also discussed forming a militia. The good attendance that the TF Warrior lawyer and his national assistant had for their classes on the legal system also indicate that the way is open to establishing rule of law and the value of on-site mentoring. Additionally, Afghan reconciliation efforts in Alasay (reported Ref C) are showing some results. The National Directorate of Security (NDS) has vetted between 30 and 50 local fighters swearing allegiance to GIROA, but the Program-e Talkh-e Sol (PTS) program lacks the integrity to provide tangible benefits or guarantee that they do not return to fighting. The recent termination of USAID and other international support to PTS may have been due to legitimate problems of accountability; however, the absence of any mechanism to assist reconciliation means that a key tool is missing from the COIN toolbox.

Development

¶19. (S) The return of government authority to Alasay is too recent for development to be a reality more than a promise. Shortly after military forces arrived, tactical Humanitarian Assistance (HA) and Medical Civic Action Programs (MEDCAPS) provided by PRT Kapisa, the French CIMIC unit, and the ANA (using U.S.-supplied HA) quickly established a connection to the population. The PRT and TF Warrior followed up with a dozen-odd Quick Action Projects that employed over 200 people and injected over \$70,000 into the local economy. Eight million dollars worth of projects are in the military Commanders' Emergency Relief Program (CERP) pipeline,

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including constructing a high school, rehabilitating the main mosque, and improving the road from Tagab to Alasay.

¶10. (S) The government and population are manifestly eager to receive these benefits and more. The GIROA has scant resources of its own, and is largely dependent on aid from the PRT. Potential USAID activities include ten wells that will take at least two months to get back on line due to non-performance of the implementing partner, a survey for an eventual market development grant, and the possibility of a much-needed Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) presence that is currently in the design stage. The promise of development is valuable at this early stage in Alasay to the degree that it enhances the legitimacy of the government. However, the need to better synch development activities to follow the PRT's work in the early phase of stabilization is an evident COIN gap.

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